

**Skeletons in the Classroom Closet: Presence/absence in the
“democratic” public sphere of the academy**
**Squelettes dans le placard de la classe : présence/absence dans
la sphère publique « démocratique » de l'école**

Johanne Provençal

Volume 43, numéro 2, printemps 2008

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/019581ar>
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/019581ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculty of Education, McGill University

ISSN

0024-9033 (imprimé)
1916-0666 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Provençal, J. (2008). Skeletons in the Classroom Closet: Presence/absence in the “democratic” public sphere of the academy. *McGill Journal of Education / Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill*, 43(2), 173–186.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/019581ar>

Résumé de l'article

L'auteure réunit les écrits de Paulo Freire et Jürgen Habermas dans le but de savoir si un dialogue est possible dans la classe ou si, dans une culture de discussion rationnelle, la classe devient plus oppressive que démocratique? En adoptant un ton et un style qui tentent d'inviter les squelettes à sortir du placard de la classe, l'auteure demande aux lecteurs scolarisés de prêter une oreille attentive, d'être à l'écoute des tensions qui peuvent exister dans la classe et dans l'école. Elle fait valoir que le climat de la classe et de l'école risque de devenir plus oppressif que démocratique, et réclame ce que M. Freire qualifie de « témoin » et de confiance dans les conférences universitaires, les conseils de formulation des politiques, les salles du personnel des écoles et les classes. Finalement, l'auteure étend la comparaison à l'édition d'ouvrages savants, et ouvre la porte à d'autres questions concernant les squelettes dans les placards d'un grand nombre de journaux érudits.

SKELETONS IN THE CLASSROOM CLOSET: PRESENCE/ABSENCE IN THE “DEMOCRATIC” PUBLIC SPHERE OF THE ACADEMY

JOHANNE PROVENÇAL *Simon Fraser University*

ABSTRACT. The author brings together Paulo Freire and Jürgen Habermas to ask whether dialogue is possible in the classroom or whether, in a culture of rational debate, the classroom becomes more oppressive than democratic? In a voice and style that attempts to invite the skeletons out of the classroom closet, the author asks scholarly readers to lend an ear, to give audience to the tensions in the classroom and the academy. She argues that the classroom and academy are at risk of being more oppressive than democratic, and calls for what Freire describes as “witness” and trust in academic conferences, policy boardrooms, school staff rooms, and classrooms. Finally, the author extends the metaphor to scholarly publishing, and asks also about the skeletons in the closets of many scholarly journals.

SQUELETTES DANS LE PLACARD DE LA CLASSE :

PRÉSENCE/ABSENCE DANS LA SPÈRE PUBLIQUE « DÉMOCRATIQUE » DE L'ÉCOLE

RÉSUMÉ. L'auteure réunit les écrits de Paulo Freire et Jürgen Habermas dans le but de savoir si un dialogue est possible dans la classe ou si, dans une culture de discussion rationnelle, la classe devient plus oppressive que démocratique? En adoptant un ton et un style qui tentent d'inviter les squelettes à sortir du placard de la classe, l'auteure demande aux lecteurs scolarisés de prêter une oreille attentive, d'être à l'écoute des tensions qui peuvent exister dans la classe et dans l'école. Elle fait valoir que le climat de la classe et de l'école risque de devenir plus oppressif que démocratique, et réclame ce que M. Freire qualifie de « témoin » et de confiance dans les conférences universitaires, les conseils de formulation des politiques, les salles du personnel des écoles et les classes. Finalement, l'auteure étend la comparaison à l'édition d'ouvrages savants, et ouvre la porte à d'autres questions concernant les squelettes dans les placards d'un grand nombre de journaux érudits.

If you can't get rid of the skeleton in your closet, you'd best teach it to dance. (George Bernard Shaw)

I feel compelled to say something about the skeletons in the closets of the classrooms I have known, from the seven grade schools I attended by the time I reached the seventh grade, to the all-girl Catholic high school closets

of my teen years, to the grad school seminar closets of my current doctoral program. Different closets, in different places at different times, yet all filled with skeletons that only now I am beginning to understand, because I sometimes find myself at risk of becoming a skeleton myself. To open an article for a scholarly journal with such statements as these is to ask if a peek may be permitted, if the doors of classroom closets may be opened ever so slightly, if the skeletons may be invited to come out, if only on tip-toe. Certainly, some of the classroom closet skeletons are mine; however, upon entering the classroom closet, I encounter skeletons that are not my own. What I ask is that, in the name of the popular banner of democracy that is currently being held up across classrooms and continents both, skeletons too must be given access to the public sphere.

This is problematic; however, so too is the popular banner of democracy that is being held up. There is little doubt that the skeletons (both literally and figuratively) in the closets of democracy are many. What I consider here (and what I ask the reader to consider) is how the democratic public sphere of the classroom, so often (though perhaps presumptuously) trusted as a well-intentioned and inclusive forum for deliberation, is a forum that, in privileging intellectual presence (and a narrow and normative definition of intellectual, at that) becomes oppressive in its prohibition of emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual presence. The skeletons that I would like to either let out of the closet or teach to dance are the skeletons of emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual presence that have been intimidated and inhibited out of the public sphere of the classroom. The purpose of this article is to focus on Habermas and his description of how, in a public sphere of rational debate, oppression and dominance disappear as they dissolve into “reason” (Habermas, 1989, p. 88). I then call on Freire and his description of how fear of freedom brings a kind of conformism and dehumanization that prevents the presence that seems necessary for the transformation of the public sphere of the classroom, the academy, and scholarly publishing, lest they be left captive to the oppressiveness that makes people see – and I would add, turns people into – ghosts (Freire, 2004 [1970], p. 36). Although I make some reference to more contemporary work, I draw primarily on one work of Habermas and one of Freire, as these two works brought together have helped me to make sense of what I have found is absent and present in the public sphere of the academy (and by extension, in scholarly publishing).

Who’s afraid of the public sphere?

Though a discussion of the relationship between the public sphere and the private sphere of course extends beyond Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* does offer a useful socio-historical perspective on the changing dynamic and

reversal(s) of what has been understood as the public/private divide. The changed – and by extension one would think still changing – meaning and blurring of the private/public divide bring an informed understanding of the “public sphere” and it seems worthwhile to quickly trace an admittedly simplified account of Habermas’ description in order to give context to an understanding of the public sphere of the classroom.

From the city-state of ancient Greece, to the feudal system of the Middle Ages, to the capitalist system of the modern era, Habermas traces a history of the public sphere. In the city-state of ancient Greece, presence in the public sphere (*polis*) of the marketplace (*agora*) was afforded to free citizens (to the exclusion of women and slaves), who engaged in *lexis* (discussion) and *praxis* (action). Under the feudal system of the Middle Ages, access to the market was afforded to the commons of the public (*publica*); however, the status of the private realm (which had been the patriarchal mastery of the Greek city-state household) made itself present in the public sphere by distinction of dress and demeanor, exemplified in the courtly etiquette of the fifteenth century. The exemplars of courtly etiquette became members of the aristocratic “high society” of the Renaissance and it is here that Habermas claims, “for the first time private and public spheres became separate in a specifically modern sense” (p. 11). High society or “civil society” of the eighteenth century was a society of private persons (private in the sense that their wealth and office were free from the earlier domination of the public authority of the monarchy) who, with the fall of feudalism and the rise of capitalism, became members of the bourgeois public sphere.

Presence in the bourgeois public sphere took the form of participation in the “traffic in commodities and news” (Habermas, p. 15) and the link here to education becomes evident, because traffic in news was accessible only to the minority who had access to education. Similarly, the salons and coffee houses – the early monuments of free speech and rational debate – were public gatherings, as Habermas reminds us, of private persons (persons with private holdings) and therefore private interests, though private interests taken as common interests simply because they were common to those who were there (in contrast to the majority of the populace who wasn’t there). What is more, says Habermas, in this public sphere of rational debate that excluded “commoners” and veritable common interests, the domination of the public interest of the majority by the private interests of the minority became invisible, as it was dissolved under the guise and legitimacy of *reason*, of the intellectual presence found in the rational debate of the public sphere. When at the end of the nineteenth century, with the arrival of advertising, the traffic in news changed, as Habermas describes it, “from the journalism of private men of letters to the public consumer services of the mass media,”¹ access to the public sphere of rational debate and intellectual presence was extended beyond the bourgeois public sphere. Certainly the importance of

access to the press, to literacy, and to education is not to be underestimated. Yet, what these traces of historical presence in the public sphere illustrate is the capacity of reason to conceal a rationalized, oppressive domination of intellectual presence in a public sphere that does not invite/permit (among other things) emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical presence to enter the dialogue.

Indeed, the importance of giving attention to more than “intellectual” aspects of personhood is an issue well understood and taken up in discourse on holistic education:

Holistic education emphasizes the interconnectedness of all aspects of the human person – the intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, physical, moral and aesthetic. It is understood that learning takes place through experience and interaction, in relation with others, and in contexts where it is shaped by the familial, social and cultural paradigms experienced. This philosophical and conceptual orientation to the research allows for the exploration of the meaning of experience as it is understood by individuals themselves in the context of their unique biographies, and as it is given meaning by the individual's past experiences, future goals and purposes. (Beattie et al, 2007, 121)

As a graduate student entering a PhD program in education and after so many years of being “institutionalized” in schools that privileged “intellectual” presence and performance (not to mention never-ending measurement), perhaps I should not have been surprised to find skeletons of emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual presence locked away in a closet, but it was not until graduate school (both ironically and perfectly fittingly) that I was able to name what was absent in the classroom.

*Having presence of mind
(and never mind presence of body, psyche, spirit or emotion)*

I would like here to describe this “absence” I have known for many years (which conceivably is an absence many have known in the classroom) and the corresponding skeletons in the classroom closets. The first absence is in some ways the most contestable – the physical skeleton in the classroom closet – contestable because if I am in the classroom in body, this can easily be taken as physical presence. Yet, when I am sitting docile at my seat, where is the presence of movement of the body? When I am uniformed according to expectations of gender and non/sexuality, fashion and/or professionalism, what happens to the presence of body?

To extend the notion of presence/absence to psyche, spirit, and emotion, the relation changes, because it becomes a relation less tangible and the skeletons in the closet are more difficult to see. If I am to believe (as I do, because I have experienced it in most of the classrooms I have known) that upon entering the classroom, understood and accepted is the idea

that psyche, spirit, and emotions are to be checked at the door, then it is perhaps no surprise that the classroom closets are full (which leaves me to wonder to what extent persons sitting in the classrooms become empty). Please understand. I am not advocating for an altogether libertarian notion of presence that would have us all bursting with sexuality and psychologically spinning, emotional wrecks and spiritual zealots (truth be told, I am inclined to believe that if all skeletons were let out of all closets at once, this is what our classrooms would look like). In my defense, I offer the confession that I was groomed all too well by a father trained as a Jesuit and by the nuns of my high school. Contrary to appearances, perhaps, I understand perfectly propriety and prudence. In recovery from my education,² however, I also understand that propriety and prudence can be taken too far when they become dehumanizing and further still, when to dehumanize becomes a standard of conformity.

Standards of conformity are the *modus operandi* in many classrooms. School boards are required to conform to ministry of education standards. Individual schools are required to conform to school board standards. Classroom teachers are required to conform to both of these and the students are required to conform to all. In their discussion of “education as an initiation into practice,” Smeyers and Burbules draw on Wittgenstein to describe conformism to or mimicking of “the activities licensed by the practice or custom” (2006, p. 441) of a culture, community, society and elaborate as follows:

practices are not deliberately chosen conventions but are constituted by the harmonious “blind” agreement in words and activities of a group of people over a period of time, which stands in the background. . . to the extent that we are following a rule, we are doing so “unquestioningly.”(p. 442)

In the graduate seminar classrooms of my PhD in Education, after so many years in classrooms, I began to question the extent to which this kind of “blind” agreement had filled classroom closets with skeletons, my own and others. It was with the help of Freire that I first opened the closet door.

Who's afraid of Paulo Freire: Freedom from conformism

To listen to Freire, to consider it possible that I unknowingly live with “fear of freedom” or that I fear the “risks of liberty,” is to think myself a fool and a coward. Or to listen to Freire tell me that oppressors “do not wish to consider themselves. . . oppressive” (p. 143) is to think I could well be a self-deluded tyrant. Who's afraid of Paulo Freire? To borrow a line from a well-known playwright, “I am.”³ I am afraid of Paulo Freire.

It is a frightening moment, the moment of opening the door for the skeletons in the closet. I've hidden my skeletons in classroom closets, yes – the skeletons of my physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual presence – because I had to put them somewhere. These are the skeletons of physi-

cal restraint (I do not wear what I want to, and banish the thought of ever breaking into a Monty Python-esque silly walk). These are also the skeletons of becoming emotionally desensitized, of being well advised not to allow emotions to “interfere” with performance. Performance indeed. Then there are the skeletons of psychological presence that have tightly locked up in a vault of denial⁴ any sense that what happens in the classroom does, in effect, mess with your mind. And the skeletons of spiritual presence? These are the life-sentence skeletons of the forbidden questions of ontology, of demands to adopt a particular belief system and its claims to “truth” and certainty. Granted, these are some of my skeletons, which are not necessarily yours. Yet, in keeping with (and I would add, oppressed by) the subtle power of conformism, they are skeletons that I put in the same closet(s) that everyone else seemed to put theirs.

According to Freire, it is the security of conformism (p. 48) that is difficult to resist, the relationship of prescription (p. 46) that is difficult to confront. In the public sphere of the classroom where the legacy of the domination of intellectual presence becomes an oppressive force of conformism, as any oppressor, it mythicizes the world (Freire, p. 139), in this case, as a place where the intellect reigns supreme (and as noted earlier, a narrow and normative definition of the intellect, at that). Freire warns that the authority of myth rests in its power to prevent people from thinking (p. 155). Habermas and Freire brought together suggest that the intellect is capable of domination and oppression under the guise of reason and what the oppressive and reigning intellect of the classroom can prevent people from thinking is that there is any place for physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological presence in the public sphere that is the classroom.

As one contemporary scholar notes, the legacy of *reason* in the public sphere is the legacy of privileging argument and, “there are reasons to be suspicious of privileging argument. . . over other forms of communication” (Young, 2000, 37). The author elaborates:

The privileging of allegedly dispassionate speech styles, moreover, often correlates with other differences of social privilege. The speech culture of white, middle-class men tends to be more controlled...[the] speech culture of women, ethnicized or racialized minorities, and working class people, on the other hand, often is, or is perceived to be more excited and embodied, values more the expression of emotion, uses figurative language, modulates tones of voice. (p. 39-40)

With the privileging and domination of the “intellect” or reason or argumentation as a mode of communication, of inquiry, and of classroom experience (and let us not forget, as noted earlier, how these are measured), it is perhaps not surprising that there is a risk of classrooms having little room for much else.

Freire talks of cultural invasion as the imposition of one view that brings with it the inhibited expression of others (p. 152) and the conformism of the invaded person (p. 153). The terrible problem of confronting the mythicized supremacy of the intellect (and intellectual presence) is that it is resistant to being called a culture and it refuses to consider its activity an invasion. The cultural invasion is simply intellectualized as reason, as follows: emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical presence in the classroom is disruptive, disturbing, distracting, and detrimental to the intellectual work of the curriculum and of pedagogy, and let us not forget (for better *and* for worse) propriety. This is reasonable proposition at its oppressive best. Yes, emotional, psychological, spiritual and physical presence is disruptive, disturbing, distracting, and detrimental to an oppressive pedagogy of mythicized intellectual supremacy. All the more reason to look at it more closely. All the more reason to let the skeletons out of the closet, because behind the closet door can be found what Freire refers to as the boundaries of “limit-situations” which, difficult as they are to confront, are opportunities for transformation (p. 99).

Who's afraid of Paulo Freire: Freedom from dehumanization

According to Freire, transformation begins with the recognition of having been destroyed (p. 68) and what is destroyed by oppression is the humanity of the oppressed and the oppressor both (p. 44). Further, the “limit-situations” of transformation contain and are contained in themes, says Freire, and he posits that the theme of the epoch in which he was writing (which I extend to the early 21st century) is the theme of domination (p. 103); with the theme of silence as the theme of overwhelming limit-situations of oppression (p. 106). The domination of intellectual presence and the silence/absence of emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual presence can be found, I would argue, by looking to the skeletons in the classroom closets.

Citing Walkerdine, in a discussion of critical pedagogy, Ellsworth remarks as follows:

Schools have participated in producing ‘self-regulating’ individuals by developing in students capacities for engaging in rational argument. Rational argument has operated in ways that set up as its opposite an irrational Other, which has been understood historically as the province of women and other exotic Others. (p. 301)

Ellsworth notes further that, “White women, men and women of color, impoverished people, people with disabilities, gays and lesbians, are...silenced in the sense. . . [that they] are just not talking in their authentic voices, or they are declining/refusing to talk at all” (p. 313). This would lead me to believe (or even reason) that perhaps these are the skeletons, other than my own, that I have met in the closets.

As I write this, I anticipate the familiar tune that has so often rung in my ears, the chorus of the defenders of the supremacy of rational debate and the (sometimes desperate) tactic of dropping that bomb of empiricist culture (which refuses to call itself a culture) that is so often posed in discussions of change to education (or any change, for that matter): exactly how do I expect to prove that these skeletons, as I call them, are there at all, or if they are there, that it is possible or desirable to let them out? I call on Freire to respond:

Since it is necessary to divide the people in order to preserve the status quo and (thereby) the power of the dominators, it is essential for the oppressors to keep the oppressed from perceiving their strategy. So the former must convince the latter that they are being “defended” against the demonic action of “marginals, rowdies, and enemies of God” . . . to divide and confuse people, the destroyers call themselves builders, and accuse the true builders of being destroyers. (p. 146)

I understand that this very argument could be used against me, because who is to say that in naming the domination of intellectual presence an oppressive force (or in calling empiricism a culture), indeed, who is to say whether I want to build, rather than to destroy something? And the irony of this is not lost on me: as a doctoral student, clearly, something has kept me coming back to classrooms. A love of intellectual engagement indeed has kept me paying tuition for so many years. As I proceed through my doctoral degree in the field of education, however, I cannot help but more closely examine what has been going on (and what has been locked away) in the name of “intellectual engagement.” In my defense, this time I ask that the voice of Derrida be heard: to deconstruct is not to destroy.⁵ Looking to Freire and considering the effects of centuries of the cultural invasion of reason and empiricism that presents itself as superior (Freire, p. 160) would instruct me that I “know nothing” (Freire, p. 63) unless I have proof, or at minimum, unless I have a rationale to defend me, and I cannot help but ask, what damage has been done?

There is good reason to be afraid, if not of Paulo Freire, then of what he would have people see. To see the dehumanization of the domination of intellectual presence at the cost of oppressed physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual presence is to divide people in a manner that is evident in but also beyond the political and socio-economic divide that tends to be the focus of dialogues of oppression or dialogues that purport to be *of* and *in* a democratic public sphere. This brings Freire and Habermas together once again, because as Habermas’ history of presence in the public sphere illustrates, conformism to codes of conduct – dehumanizing as codes of conduct can be, something to which history and the nightly news both attest – is conduct often determined according to privilege. If it is true, as Freire claims, that “oppressors do not favor promoting the community as

a whole, but rather selected leaders” (p. 143); and if it is true that “one of the methods of manipulation is to inoculate individuals with the bourgeois appetite for personal success” (p. 149); it stands to reason (to use the required language of rational debate) that the fear of freedom, alongside conformism and dehumanization, prohibit physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual presence from entering the public sphere of the classroom because personal success in the classroom requires that the skeletons are locked in the closet. This is ridiculous, of course. It is ridiculous to think that it is possible to lock the closet door (and throw away the key), because in the same way, as described by Habermas, that the members of the bourgeois public sphere fooled themselves into thinking that they could leave private interests out of the sphere they termed “the public sphere of rational debate,” it is foolish to think that the skeletons do not in some way either follow people out of the closet or pull them in there. If there is any truth to this, then it seems sensible enough (again, in keeping with the rules of rationale) to allow the skeletons in the closet to enter the dialogue of the classroom, if the classroom is to be a democratic rather than an oppressive public sphere.

I do understand that this is easier said than done, and I also recognize that many (if not most) teachers do their best in negotiating what is brought in or left out of the classroom. In *Teaching and Its Predicaments* (1997), Burbules describes contradictions or conflicts in teaching as a practice and suggests one “way to approach such dilemmas: *Don’t* seek a way of making them disappear, but keep the tension alive – a dialectic that does not move towards resolution but yields creativity out of the sustained movement back and forth” (p. 71). This fits very well with Freire’s thinking on dialogue and in particular, issues of vulnerability, witness and trust.

The presence of dialogue: vulnerability, witness, trust

In a time when dialogue is taken up and understood as a necessary part of academic conferences, policy board rooms, school staff rooms, and students’ classrooms, it may well be advisable to keep in mind something Freire left us decades ago: “Dialogue cannot exist ... in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people” (p. 89). I find it troubling that this kind of idea can sometimes be easily dismissed as sentimentalism, as idealism, as impossibility. I find it troubling also that what I witness in academic conferences, policy board rooms, school staff rooms, and students’ classrooms is not often enough what I would describe as “a profound love for the world and for people.” And this notion of “witness” is key, says Freire. It is a “constant, humble, and courageous witness emerging from cooperation in a shared effort. . . [of] liberation” (p. 176). It is witness to the “vulnerability of the oppressor”(64) and the experience of living in a “climate of mutual trust” (p. 91) and interaction (p. 50).

It is witness to the skeletons in the closet (mine and others') and it is the liberty to witness the door opening to let them out. The mutual trust is one that would give me the liberty to have the physical presence of standing and stretching at academic conferences or of wearing something that allows me my sexuality on the days that I want to bring my sexuality with me. The liberty of emotional presence would give me the freedom to say that it upsets me to see intellectual bullying among academics (described to me once, by someone with whom I share mutual trust, as "the snake pit" of the academy); or the freedom, when shaking someone's hand, to hold it and tell them that I have missed them, that I am happy to see them. The liberty of psychological presence would give me the freedom to ask, on occasion, if anyone else finds what is happening in classrooms (and the world) terribly upsetting at times, because I am sometimes overwhelmed with such thoughts (and feelings) when I turn the computer off and close the books and I am left with the dis/quiet of my mind to reflect on all that I absorb in a given day, week, month. And the liberty of spiritual presence would give me the freedom to attend to my "spiritual" needs and health without risk of being condemned for having a "belief system" that does not adhere to a defined and categorical notion of "spirituality."

To all of this I again anticipate opposition of different varieties, the most obvious (and if I may be candid, what I find as either the most short-sighted or disingenuous) is the response that I am at liberty to do these things; there is nothing to stop me. Nothing other than the consequences, that is. Witness to the skeletons being let out of the closet is witness to a mid-lecture stretch that is not looked upon as strange; or witness to sexuality without presumptions or accusations; or witness to emotion that is not labeled as unprofessional; or witness to psychological disclosure without intellectual demerit; or witness to spirit without threat of being figuratively burned at the stake. Witness in this sense, is a kind of "cultural synthesis, there are no spectators," says Freire (p. 180). There are no spectators of this form of witness in this sense that it brings with it the transformation that Freire describes as a praxis that is not limited to intellectualism or activism (p. 65), but rather, it is problem-posing and it is to critically perceive "the way *with which* and *in which*" we exist in the world (p. 83).

The un/democratic public sphere of the classroom, transformed

Talking the talk of democracy and walking the democratic walk of a public sphere of the classroom, it seems, are divided by several degrees of separation. One of these degrees of separation, as is often the case, is the divide between theory and practice. It is all fine and well to talk of letting skeletons out of the closet, of a transformed presence in the public sphere of the classroom, of Freire and Habermas. Theory is one thing, but what does it look like in practice? Is it merely a chaotic free-for-all, a pantomime, a burlesque, a motley

parade of skeletons marching out of the closet? Marching, no. Dancing, yes. One last time, I call on Freire for guidance as he cautions against a regime of hardening bureaucracy (p. 57). That said, dancing is not without form. It is form and it is practiced. And it is a form that has begun to be practiced, with some classroom closet doors opening and some skeletons coming out, to be present rather than absent. I do not offer a formula for opening the closet door or a constitution to govern the skeletons once they are let out. What I ask is that those in the public sphere of the classroom, whether grade school or grad school, teacher and/or learner, not only acknowledge that the closet is there, but recognize the legitimacy and importance of opening the door. . . in the name of this “democracy” of ours.

In looking for the legitimacy and importance of opening closet doors, there is perhaps no better closet to look to as a model than the sexuality closet, or more precisely, the homosexuality closet. Let us not underestimate the “coming out” of queer identity, or as one author extends the metaphor: the coming to, coming together, coming into view, coming around, coming to be.⁶ It is not often enough that I am witness to the “coming out” of physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual presence. That said, I have had the good fortune to witness presence of mind, body, psyche, emotion, and spirit coming out in the theory *and* practice of some of the instructors I have encountered as a doctoral student, two in particular: Heesoon Bai and Suzanne de Castell. This presence has taken the form the presence of a “source of vitality.”⁷ It has taken the form of the politics of difference.⁸ I turn here to my instructors, instructors with whom I have shared classrooms, as they have led the dancing out of the closet, not only through the theory they put to the page, but also through the practice they bring to the classroom. Whether by virtue of their willingness to be present and to witness presence, or by my inclination to see what I want to find, with these instructors and in their presence I have arrived at a better understanding of the vitality and politics involved in keeping the skeletons in the closet and in letting them out.

As a graduate student, in turning to my instructors to make permissible a public sphere of the classroom that invites not only intellectual, but also physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual presence, similarly, I turn to the sphere of what is made public in publishing.¹⁰ Just as I would argue that a democratic public sphere of the classroom must move beyond the current oppressiveness of a narrowly defined intellectual presence, I would also argue that a *democratic public sphere of letters* must go public with its own skeletons. What is the *presence* of scholars that is found in scholarly publishing? Or perhaps are dominance and “devout observances” (Veblen, 1998 [1899], p. 377) of intellectual presence that conform to uniformity of genre, style and voice in scholarly writing and publishing something that preserves an elitism much like the elitism of the bourgeois public sphere

described by Habermas?⁹ This is a question not only of the form and content included and excluded from academic discourse, but also a question of editorial integrity and academic rigour. In looking at what is given currency in academic discourse, do the sometimes narrow conventions that determine what is or is not considered *bona fide* scholarship inadvertently undermine the very academic rigour and editorial integrity that those constraints set out to uphold? Certainly, I do not advocate that the tradition of the Royal Society be altogether abandoned, but I do insist that the academy has changed, that discourse is changing. Yet, I also cannot help but recognize in rigid and unchanging conformism to content and form, to genre, style and voice in “a community of scholarship that has a tradition of delivering what is expected and accepted” (Kumashiro et al, 2005, p. 269) the ghosts of Orwellian *thought police* seem to be defending the academy against whom, against what? Rogues and radicals of academic freedom, I suppose. If that be the case, then count me among the rogues and radicals of the public sphere of the academy, as I would prefer that to being counted among the tyrants that Freire describes. To end an article for a scholarly journal with such thoughts as these is to ask about the skeletons in the closets of scholarly publishing and to ask if a peek may be permitted, if the skeletons of scholarly publishing may be invited to come out. I call on members of the academic community to invite out the closet the skeletons (those shadows of self) that are kept locked up and to call into question (as members of editorial boards, as peer reviewers, as scholars and authors) what and how we communicate in the academy and in scholarly discourse.

NOTES

1. This is taken from the sub-title of Chapter 20 in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*.
2. Here I want to acknowledge the discovery of my own skeletons that came from reading a title by Deborah Britzman: *After-Education: Anna Freud, Melanie Klein and Psychoanalytic Histories of Learning* (Sunny, 2003), because it was through her text that I encountered the idea that my education could be something that I needed to recover from and I have since then begun to do so.
3. I refer here to the film, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, and in particular my memory of Elizabeth Taylor responding to the question from Richard Burton (who plays/was her husband), the line, “*Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?*” and she answers, “I am.”
4. I think it is worthwhile here to take the reminder from Bourdieu that “the condition for the permanence of domination, cannot succeed without the complicity of the whole group: the work of denial which is the source of social alchemy is, like magic, a collective undertaking” (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 1977, 195).
5. I refer literally here to the voice of Derrida, as this is taken from a videotaped interview, in which he defends himself against the accusation that to deconstruct is to destroy: Jacques Derrida, *Wall to Wall* (Princeton: Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 1996).
6. I refer here to the subheads of several chapters of Judith Roof's *Come as You Are: Sexuality and Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

7. I refer here to the theory and practice of Heesoon Bai, in particular, to "The Stop: The Practice of Reanimating the Universe Within and Without" (*Educational Insights*, 2003). Also I refer to "Cultivating Democratic Citizenship: Towards Intersubjectivity." (*Philosophy of Education: Introductory Readings*, Revised 3rd Edition (William Hare and John Portelli, Eds.). Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 2001).
8. I refer here to the theory and practice of Suzanne de Castell, in particular, to *Radical interventions: Identity, politics and difference in educational praxis* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997).
9. As someone who has ten years of combined professional and academic experience in publishing (my MA is in publishing and I have worked with many publishers – mostly independent, literary book, and magazine publishers), I believe that I understand reasonably well the mechanisms and implications of what is made public in publishing. It has led me to turn some of my attention to scholarly publishing and academic discourse.

REFERENCES

- Bai, H. (2003). The stop: The practice of reanimating the universe within and without. *Educational Insights*, 8(1). Retrieved 15 August 2006, from <http://ccfi.educ.ubc.ca/publication/insights/v08n01/contextualexplorations/bai/bai.html>
- Beattie, M., Dobson, D., Thornton, G., and Hegge, L. (2007). Interacting narrat <http://ccfi.educ.ubc.ca/publication/insights/v08n01/contextualexplorations/bai/bai.html> ives: Creating and re-creating the self. *The International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26(2), 119-141.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Britzman, D. (2003). *After-education: Anna Freud, Melanie Klein and psychoanalytic histories of learning*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Burbules, N. (1997). Teaching and the tragic sense of education. In N. Burbles & M. Hansen (Eds.), *Teaching and its predicaments*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- de Castell, S., & Bryson, M. (Eds.). (1997) *Radical in<ter>ventions: Identity, politics and difference in educational praxis*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Derrida, J. (1996). *Wall to wall*. Princeton: Films for the Humanities & Sciences.
- Ellsworth, E. (1989). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 59(3), 297-324.
- Freire, P. (2004). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum Publishing Group.
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Kumashiro, K., Pinar, W. F., Graue, E., Grant, C. A., Benham, M. K. P., Heck, R. H., Scheurich, J. J., Luke, A., & Luke, C. (2005). Thinking collaboratively about the peer-review process for journal-article publication. *Harvard Educational Review*, 75(3), 257-285.
- Roof, J. (2000). *Come as you are: Sexuality and narrative*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Smeyers, P., & Burbules, N. (2006). Education as initiation into practices. *Educational Theory* 56(4), 439-449.
- Veblen, T. (1998 [1899]). *The theory of the leisure class*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Young, I. (2000). *Inclusion and democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

JOHANNE PROVENÇAL is a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. Her doctoral research examines the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada's (SSHRC) knowledge mobilization discourse and the implications and possibilities it has for the social sciences and humanities research community in Canada. She has also worked in the publishing field as a substantive and stylistic editor of scholarly writing.

JOHANNE PROVENÇAL est candidate au doctorat à la faculté des sciences de l'éducation de l'Université Simon Fraser. Dans sa recherche doctorale, l'auteure examine la mobilisation du savoir et le discours du Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada (CRSH), ainsi que les conséquences et les possibilités de ces éléments pour le milieu des études humaines et de la recherche en sciences sociales au Canada. Elle a aussi travaillé dans le secteur de l'édition à titre de réviseure de contenu et de style des ouvrages érudits.